

Community Assistantship Program

**Marketing Strategies for Kensington
Runestone Park**

Prepared in partnership with
Douglas County Public Works Department, Park Division

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MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR KENSINGTON RUNE STONE PARK
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Introduction

The Kensington Rune Stone has intrigued and sparked debate since its discovery by Olof Ohman in 1898. The discovery of an historic record like this Stone provides a glimpse into world history and the heritage of Minnesotans. There is a long and proud Nordic lineage prominent in the family names and businesses of the surrounding area.

Douglas County, with advisory help from the Kensington Rune Stone Park Foundation, has owned and operated Kensington Rune Stone Park since 1972. The 193-acre park, which includes the Ohman farmstead and the place where Olof and his sons found the Stone, is the subject of a Master Concept Plan. The plan includes a Master Park Plan, an Archaeology & Historic Preservation Plan, and an Architectural Assessment of the Ohman Farm House.

This Marketing Strategies Report was prescribed during the initial planning sessions. The report is incorporated as a permanent addition to the Master Concept Plan. It is intended to inform the Foundation and others about detailed steps required to successfully build a viable and sustainable tourism center around the Park.

With cooperation from other Scandinavian Cultural Sites, this Marketing Strategies Report researched critical steps and procedures used to create prominent and sustainable tourism areas in other parts of Minnesota. We will analyze actions taken by these Cultural Institutions and suggest actions which need to be taken by the people interested in re-vitalizing Kensington Rune Stone Park.

Project Background

The Master Plan for Kensington Rune Stone Park was designed to emphasize the Ohman Farmstead and the Rune Stone Discovery site. The restoration of the Ohman Farmstead will take visitors back in time to 1898 with original artifacts, interpretive displays and events, and preservation of the discovery site. Three Interpretive Themes will be developed in phases. The themes are:

- **The Kensington Rune Stone is an extraordinary artifact**
- **The Ohman Family and farmstead are intimately connected to the history of this place**
- **Long before the Ohmans made this land their home, others had done the same**

With completion of each phase, Kensington Rune Stone Park moves a step closer to becoming a valuable Interpretative Center. Each phase must be completed to achieve the desired sustainable tourism benefit. The park should be a positive attribute for the economy of the city of Kensington, southwest Douglas County, and the other regional centers linked to the Kensington Rune Stone. This study researches answers to some key questions;

What will the improved park do to improve the economic vitality of Kensington, Alexandria, and the region?

How can the cities and county work together to accomplish sustainable tourism for this region?

How do we ensure that the people of Kensington benefit from this sustainable tourism effort?

Sustainable Tourism

For Kensington and the Park to achieve sustainable tourism benefits we must first know what sustainable tourism is. One definition that provides a simple formula is:

**“Tourism in a form that can maintain viability in an area
for an indefinite period of time.”**

Because the Kensington Rune Stone is such an integral part of Kensington and the surrounding community, it is vitally important that projects maintain integrity with the historic interpretation of the stone. Sustainable tourism development involves management of all resources in such a way that the economic, social, and aesthetic needs are fulfilled, while maintaining cultural integrity. The Rune Stone and its story can be connected with many families in the surrounding area. The integrity of the community's history depends on the preservation of its culture and values.

The park and its visitors should follow ethical principles that respect the culture and environment of the host area, the economy, and the local leadership. The park, to become a sustainable tourism site reflecting these values, will need to involve the citizens of Kensington in the decision making processes of the park. The steps taken by Kensington to accommodate visitors will also have to be determined by local leadership. To create sustainable tourism, a criterion can be followed to ensure the vitality of the site. The appendices at the end of this report will review these criteria through a series of worksheets that can be used by the community for planning.

Step 1: Identify the Market for Cultural Tourism

Who is the heritage tourist and what makes them unique?

What is this tourist seeking?

Step 2: Assess your Destination's Cultural Heritage Resources

Identify and inventory potential attractions and themes.

Evaluate the integrity and authenticity of historic resources.

Step 3: Develop and Refine your Strategic Plan

Develop an exciting and alluring theme making sure it meets the expectations of your visitors.

Make sure that Kensington Rune Stone Park stands out. Develop strategies involving hotels, restaurants, community leaders, planners, museums, other parks, and tourism promotion groups.

Step 4: Find and Secure Funding

Sources which can be acquired include national and state agencies, community development funds, and historic preservation funds at the state and local level.

Step 5: Manage your Site for Sustainable Tourism

How will you provide and maintain a constant supply of resources for the project.

Step 6: Interpret your Heritage for Visitors

How will you make informational literature more interesting?

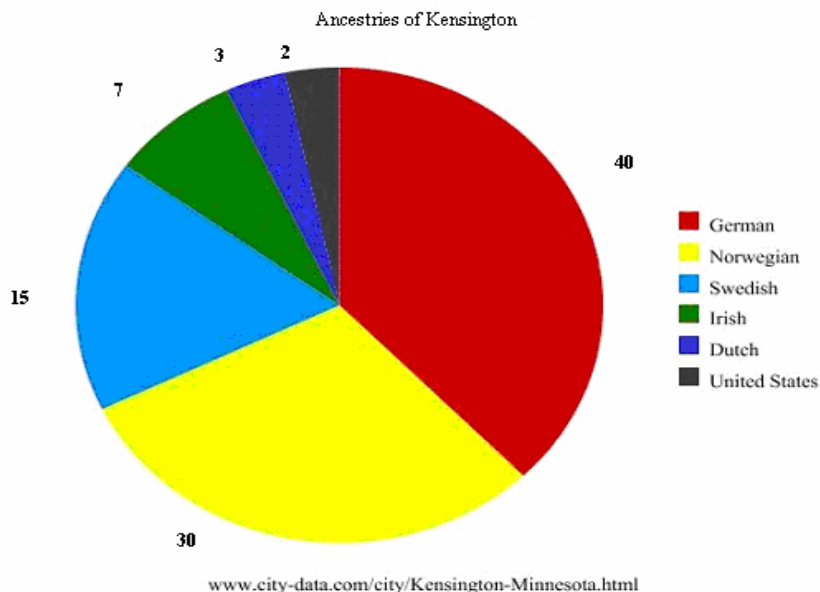
What can be done to insure that a visit to the area is a memorable, educational, and entertaining experience?

A key step to creating a successful sustainable tourism area is providing the tourist with places to satisfy their needs and wants. Alexandria has, over many years, become the local center for tourism. Transforming the city of Kensington into a tourism center will be an equally long term task. We can begin by taking a look at what the city of Kensington has to offer.

Kensington Minnesota

Kensington, Minnesota is a small community with a residential population of 286, further described as 140 males and 146 females. (2000 census) The average age is 37.4 years. The average household income is \$34,400.00. The estimated 2005 median house value in Kensington is \$50,500.00. By comparison, the average income in Minnesota is \$52,024.00 and the median house value is \$198,800.00.

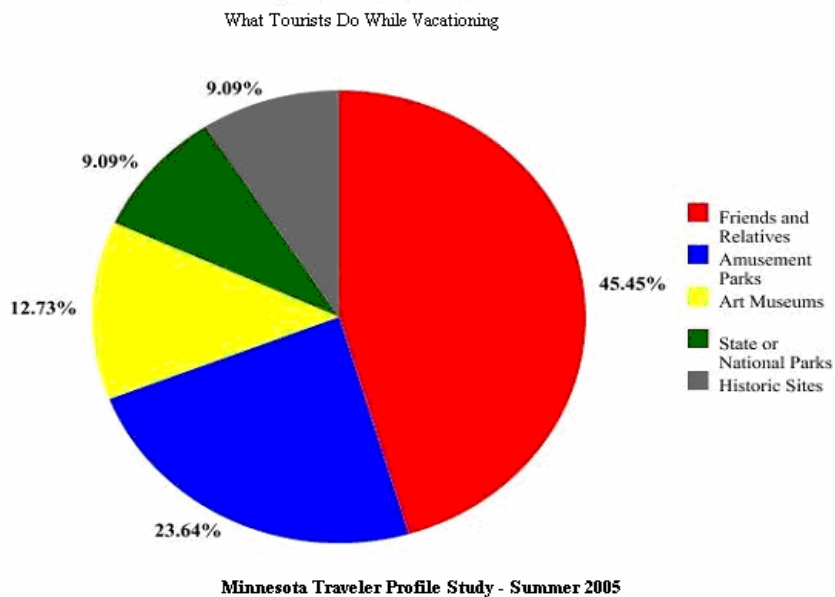
Kensington has a rich ethnic heritage of European and American Ancestries



With so much cultural heritage located in the community, it is easy to understand why the tourism prospects for the City and the Park are encouraging. In order to compete and collaborate with Alexandria, Kensington will need to create a regional draw or reason to come to the area. Lower income and housing values can result in difficulty financing expenditures for improvements like this.

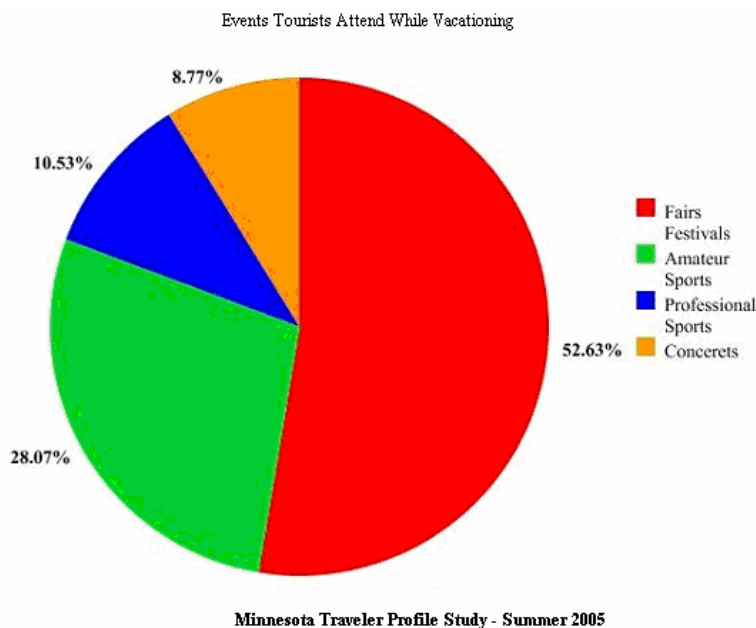
Visitors

Tourism in Minnesota is vital to the economy. Tourism destinations depend on yearly visitors who come from all over the region, nation, and world. The average Minnesota tourist is 43.5 years of age with an income of \$65,300.00. Travelers interviewed during the Davidson-Peterson Minnesota Traveler Profile Study, 2005, stated that most of their trips were “short pleasure trips” including vacations on extended weekends of 4 days or fewer. What do travelers like to do while vacationing?



The information in the Minnesota Traveler Profile Study demonstrates that collaboration with the Runestone Museum adds a feature that tourists will attend while on vacation. Parks and Museums appeal to 30% of tourists. Throw in the strong family backgrounds in this area and the number rises to 75%. If a museum were located in Kensington, that same benefit would occur within the city of Kensington.

What events attract tourists while they are vacationing?



(<http://www.tourism.umn.edu/research/2005SummerTravelerProfile.pdf>)

It is clear that Fairs & Festivals dominate this graphical representation. Kensington and Alexandria both hold festivals yearly which draw large numbers of visitors. Children, and their desire to learn while having fun, can be the focus of planning festival events. Theatrical groups acting out the Interpretive Themes developed for the Park are one

obvious choice. The phenomenon of the Stone's ability to inspire belief and doubt, celebration and sadness, and always passion, provide fertile ground for creative works. The Ohman family symbolizes the historic immigrant experience – its trials and tribulations. Native Americans have surely lived in this area long before the Ohmans made this land their home. The sciences of geology and anthropology along with research designed to document and preserve history provide inspiration for educational programming.

Choosing local individuals, organizations, and businesses to supply labor, food, exhibits, entertainment, and souvenirs for the festivals can bring economic benefits to the region and generate capital to invest in the park improvement project

Historical Preservation Sites and Interpretive Centers

To understand what Kensington and the Kensington Rune Stone Park Foundation could do, we will look at other Heritage Tourism Sites and the actions they have taken.

Gammelgården Museum 20880 Olinda Trail, Scandia Minnesota
651-433-5053 gammelgardenlynne@frontiernet.net

The Gammelgården Museum is a prime example of creating and maintaining a sustainable tourism site. The Museum is located on land purchased by the Elim Lutheran Church in 1972. The historic buildings were preserved by the church. The National Bicentennial in 1976 created a renewed interest in the immigrant roots people share. This event lead visitors to local sites like the Gammelgården.

Keeping the message simple and to the point, the Gammelgården Museum's mission statement reads;

“Preserving, Presenting and Promoting Immigrant History”.

Gammelgården Museum Revenue Breakdown

Membership = 30% of revenue
Festivals = 30-40% of revenue
Gift Shop = 20-25% of revenue
Donations = 0-5% of revenue

Gammelgården offers a variety of events to attract children and adults. As you can see from the figures above, 30-40% of revenues come from festivals. When the Gammelgården talks about festivals they don't mean one or two large events a year. Their strategy is to hold two or three small events a month enticing people to return to the site. The following is an Income/Expense Statement for the Museum.

Income (January-July, 2007)

4010 Membership	4,255.00
4020 Special Events	1,816.79
4030 Admissions	1,935.50
4040 Classes, etc.	1,300.00
4050 Interest on Bank Account	13,861.57
4060 Memorials & Donations	5,014.00
4060 Misc. Income General Fund	20,225.00
Total Income	48,407.86

Expenses

6100 Payroll	21,333.00
6120 Ads and Website	1,871.28
6210 Repair/Maintenance	2,125.38
6280 Office	463.66
6290 Volunteer Expense	462.90

6300 Dues/ Subscriptions	97.66
6310 Special Event Exp.	394.00
6330 Furnishing/Decorating	357.74
6440 Utilities	3,654.55
6450 Misc. Expenses	2,210.00
Total Expenses	32,970.17
Net Income	15,437.69

The site has progressed much since the 1980s. In 2002 years of planning resulted in construction of a home for the museum, the Välkommen Hus. The investment, in excess of \$560,000.00, is a re-creation of an 1850's Swedish farmhouse. The Välkommen Hus includes a lobby, office, gift shop, restrooms, classroom, and storage space. The walls of the Gammelgården Museum are used to display artwork that takes visitors back to 1850's farmstead design. The meeting area can be rented for weddings, banquets, and corporate outings. The Gammelgården has a large membership which results in returning patrons for the business.

The Museum Board of Directors has 16 members; 8 local representatives, 4 members from other communities to provide balance, and 4 members of a private donor group interested in Scandinavian history. The Museum is a non-profit corporation owned by the church. Private capital fundraising was required for the Välkommen Hus because churches are not eligible for federal funding or loans.

The Gammelgården Museum has been a member of Explore Minnesota Tourism since 1980. Other advertising efforts include AAA magazine and collaboration with other prominent Swedish Institutes. The relationship with other Swedish Institutes helps draw tourist groups from those sites. Gammelgården works with other museums to offer discounted admission to the partner sites. This cooperation has resulted in increased

memberships, inquiries, and visitors. Groups are able to organize itineraries that include the partnered sites.

The Gammelgården is also actively involved with the community. Interest earned on CDs and savings instruments add value to the organization while the capital aids the business economy of the locality. The Gammelgården depends on the community to provide volunteer work in return for the vital historical resource. Events held at the Gammelgården bring money into the Foundation as well as to the local economy. Every business in the area has recognized increased sales during tourist season. The entire community benefits from this preservation of local heritage history.

Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center

202 1st Ave North, Moorhead, MN 56560

218-299-5511 www.hjemkomst-center.com

The Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center is another great example of preserving local history. The area around Moorhead, Minnesota, steeped in tradition and heritage, shines with educational possibilities and the entertainment aspects of a first class historical site. The mission statement of the center is clear and defined:

“To enlighten and inspire the public by interpreting the life, culture, and heritage of the Red River Valley”.

The Hjemkomst Center, a life long dream turned reality, opened in 1982. Robert Asp of Moorhead dreamed of building a Viking ship and sailing it to Norway. Asp completed his ship in 1980 and christened it the “Hjemkomst”, Norwegian for

“Homecoming”. He participated in the maiden voyage that same year shortly before he passed away. In 1982 family members finished his quest by sailing The Hjemkomst from Duluth, Minnesota to Bergen, Norway. Upon returning to North America his family and the ship became the inspiration for the Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center.

There is a strong tradition at the Hjemkomst Center of teaching Nordic history along with stories of the Red River Valley. The layout of the Center accommodates large numbers of visitors. The museum includes a gift shop, learning center, and group meeting rooms. The Hjemkomst Center hosts a variety of exhibits drawing tourists from all of Minnesota. These permanent resources, along with numerous temporary exhibits, encourage repeat visits.



(Photos from Hjemkomst Interpretive Center)

The center uses interactive events planned to allow visitors the experience of becoming part of history. On July 21, 2007 the Viking era came to life in Viking Ship Park. A re-created village, featuring Viking Age arts and crafts, allowed visitors to “Party like its 899”. The Hjemkomst Center worked with members of the Society for Creative

Anachronism to enable children to learn about Viking life. Activities in Viking Ship Park included weaving, chain mail making, felt making, rune writing, Viking era game playing, and coin stamping. The demonstrations and visitor-involved activities encouraged participation in a history oriented learning process.

Along with the museum, which houses the beautiful ship, the campus of the Hjemkomst Center includes the Hopperstad Stave Church, a full scale replica of the Hopperstad Church in Vik, Norway. This strenuous work, including all of the hand carvings on the building, was done by Guy Paulson as a labor of love. A monument to Nordic Spiritual life, the church helps visitors feel the wonder of the by-gone era.



(Photos from Hjemkomst Interpretive Center)

The Hjemkomst Center is advertised widely using highway signs and mixed media. Much like the Gammelgården Museum in Scandia, the Hjemkomst Center brings economic value to the surrounding community. As people visit the Center, they take advantage of other resources offered in the Moorhead\Fargo area. The collaboration between The Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center, other Nordic Institutes, and Explore Minnesota Tourism, has helped the Center become a successful sustainable site.

The Runestone Museum

206 Broadway Alexandria, MN 56308

(320) 763-3160 www.runestonemuseum.org

In 1898 farmer Olof Ohman uncovered a medieval rune stone tangled in the roots of a tree on hilly farmland near Kensington Minnesota. The Stone, known internationally as the Kensington Rune Stone, tells of a journey into the North American continent by travelers during the 14th century. The Ohman farmstead was established as Kensington Rune Stone Park by Douglas County in the 1970's and is the primary subject of this market study.



In 1958 a museum was established 15 miles from the farm in Alexandria, Minnesota. The Runestone Museum has been home to the Kensington Rune Stone and the proud herald of Swedish and Norwegian cultural heritage ever since. A deep tradition and legacy surround the Stone, the Ohman family, and their ties to the people of this community. The Board of Directors has long held that the Stone, a focal point of the Museum's exhibits, is a genuine artifact from 1362.

Along with the Kensington Rune Stone Discovery Room, the Museum offers historical exhibits related to early Alexandria. The "Walk Down Main Street" uses photographs and cultural items to depict life in Alexandria during the years of 1860-1900. Also on display are Wildlife Exhibits, a display of Early Native American Cultural

Artifacts, a Children's Interactive History Room, and a display devoted to local residents who have served in the Armed Forces. The Museum grounds include Fort Alexandria, a post along the Breckenridge to St. Paul Trail, housing a church, a blacksmith shop, and other historical buildings.



Like the Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center and the Gammelgården Museum, the Runestone Museum depends on heritage tourism. The Museum sponsors events that invite the community to become involved. "A Day at the Fort" is a re-enacting event that portrays life in a frontier garrison during the Mid-West's pioneer days. High school actors and volunteers provide demonstrations. Events like this encourage people to experience the Museum while learning history and helps create a sense of community for visitors.

The Runestone Museum works in collaboration with Explore Minnesota Tourism and local Educational Institutions to broaden exposure. The Minnesota Lakes Maritime Museum, located next door, cooperatively provides discounted rates for groups and individuals who visit both sites. This helps both organizations attract customers and shows visitors an aspect of the community they might otherwise have missed.

All of these centers depend on volunteer work to sustain them. Volunteers contributed over 1800 hours to the Runestone Museum during 2007.

American Swedish Institute

2600 Park Avenue Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55407

(612) 871-4907 <http://www.americanswedishinst.org>

The American Swedish Institute was founded in 1929 by Swan J. Turnblad. The Turnblad Mansion was dedicated as a museum celebrating Swedish Culture. The mansion is listed on the National Register of Historical Sites, allowing it to be maintained and not altered.



THE AMERICAN SWEDISH INSTITUTE

An historic museum offering a variety of programs designed to celebrate Swedish culture.
Founded in 1929 by Swan J. Turnblad.



2600 Park Avenue S., Minneapolis, MN 55407 (612) 871-4907
The Turnblad mansion, which houses the Institute, is on the
National Registry of Historical Places.

The Institute does a proper job of honoring the past while working to advance relations with modern Sweden. Its crucial mission is to show visitors how immigrants affected the growth and expansion of the metropolitan area of Minneapolis. Because the nature of the exhibits affects the demographic makeup of their customers, the American Swedish Institute strives to keep all exhibits closely tied to the heritage of the Swedish population. Tour groups searching for information about relatives or the history of Swedish American culture will find many opportunities for education here.

The American Swedish Institute works closely other heritage organizations within the Twin Cities and Minnesota. Being involved with many organizations expands

networking effectiveness and advertising “bang for the buck”. Organizations such as the Sons of Norway are a powerful resource for museums, institutions, and cultural centers.

Conclusions

These four prominent, successful, and sustainable tourism sites demonstrate the potential that heritage tourism holds. The key to success is partnership. Build bridges to Explore Minnesota Tourism and other historical sites in Minnesota and beyond.

Because of the Rune Stone, Kensington has an opportunity to become an equally important player in the heritage tourism community. Success is achievable.

The Park Master Concept Plan provides the key to sparking interest and attracting visitors. Creating the local environment to serve the new visitors is the great challenge.

Follow the steps outlined in the sustainable tourism plan. Working together to evaluate plans and develop resources will result in a direct connection between the rich history of this area and the economic benefits that can come from a re-vitalized Kensington Rune Stone Park.



Marketing Strategies for Kensington Rune Stone Park - Worksheet One

Identify and Evaluate Cultural Resources & Potential Attractions

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Marketing Strategies for Kensington Rune Stone Park - Worksheet Two

Develop a Strategic Plan

1. Propose ideas and themes that might attract visitors

2. How will this work in this community

Marketing Strategies for Kensington Rune Stone Park - Worksheet Three

Find and Secure Funding – Identify Sources and Strategies

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Marketing Strategies for Kensington Rune Stone Park - Worksheet Four

Manage for Sustainable Tourism

1. What resources and supplies are needed for this project and who will supply them

Marketing Strategies for Kensington Rune Stone Park - Worksheet Five

What can be done to ensure a Memorable or Educational Experience?